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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the International Save the Children Alliance, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 March 1999]

GE.99-11519 (E)

The economic, social and cultural rights of the child

1. International Save the Children Alliance would like to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights to the process of economic exclusion that exists on a worldwide scale discriminating against the poorest countries, and the poorest groups in society. Globally, children bear the heaviest burden of economic exclusion. Child poverty is increasing faster than adult poverty in all countries at all stages of economic development. The international debt crisis continues to perpetuate the inequalities which hamper the realization of children's rights to survival and development. The Human Development Report 1997 estimates that if the Governments of Africa were relieved of their debt payments, they could save the lives of 21 million children by the year 2000 and provide 90 million girls and women with access to basic education. The current debt crisis is therefore of particular concern to the International Save the Children Alliance. Developing countries around the world owe richer countries a staggering US$ 2,170 billion. Meeting the global commitments outlined at the 1990 World Summit for Children has been estimated to require US$ 20 billion, a fraction of the 1997 global defence budget of $786 billion.

2. The nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child means that nearly every country in the world has committed itself to ensuring the well-being, survival and development of children. Yet debt visibly threatens the lives and well-being of children and Governments' ability to fulfil their obligations. It is somewhat ironic that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was signed at the height of the debt crisis. Debtors and creditor Governments alike guaranteed children the inherent right to life, survival and development (art. 6), including their right to education (arts. 28 and 29) and to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24). Furthermore, the debt burden has considerably depleted the resources which Governments have to enforce the social, economic and cultural rights of children. In this regard, States are not complying with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child in relation to, inter alia, family environment and alternative care; basic health and welfare; education, leisure and cultural activities.

3. Given this reality, we request the Commission on Human Rights:

(a) To urge all Governments to honour their commitments to child survival, development, protection and participation as laid out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We believe that the debt crisis is threatening the commitments made towards child survival and development enshrined in the Convention. Debtor and creditors alike have a binding commitment to ensure that the debt crisis is resolved. 1999 marks the tenth anniversary of the Convention and offers a good opportunity to link debt relief specifically to child development targets and, more broadly, to the poverty reduction targets of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development;

(b) To urge all Governments to follow Norway's unilateral action and cancel all of their outstanding debt;

(c) To request the Committee on the Rights of the Child to conduct a tenth anniversary study on the impacts of debt on children;

(d) To request that children's needs and rights receive a full hearing in the work of the Special Rapporteur looking into the effects of foreign debt on the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.